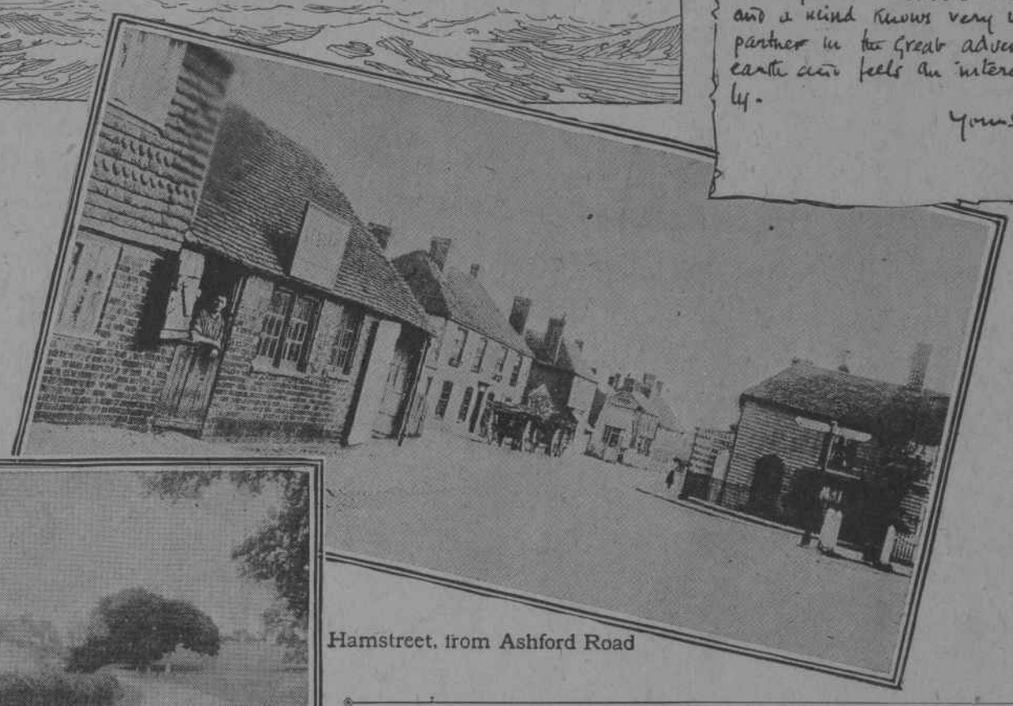
JOSEPH CONRAD, SAILOR and AUTHOR, WRITES A NEW NOVEL for the NEW YORK HERALD

JOSEPH CONRAD
Photo by Beresford, London

World's Most Famous Author of Sea Stories Has Written "Chance," a Deliciously Characteristic Tale in Which, He Says, He Aimed to Interest Women Particularly—Novel Begins in Herald Next Sunday—The Conrad Personality as Depicted by a Herald Correspondent Who Visited Him at His English Home



Hamstreet, from Ashford Road

Road Leading to Mr. Conrad's House

The Duke's Head

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Yours faithfully Joseph Conrad

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I T gives me the keenest pleasure when I find that womankind appreciates my work, and in the story which I am now writing for the NEW YORK HERALD and which begins in the HERALD of January 21 I aim at treating my subject in a way that will interest women. I don't believe that women have to be written for especially as if they were infants. Women, as far as I have been able to judge, have a grasp of and are interested in all the facts of life. I am not speaking of mere dolls, of course. Such exist even in a democracy—just as dummy men exist. But any woman with a heart and a mind knows very well that she is an active partner in the great adventure of humanity on the earth and feels an interest in all its episodes accordingly.

"What is the name of the novel? It is entitled "Chance." It deals with the life of a seaman and a woman, and it is while they are on board ship that, if I may say so, the situations develop that, I think, will appeal strongly to my readers."

These were the concluding sentences of a talk with Mr. Joseph Conrad, who after a lifetime on the sea—during which he was everything, from apprentice boy to master of an armed Belgian steamer on the Congo—settled down at the age of thirty-seven in Bessborough Gardens, London, while convalescing from Congo fever and wrote "Almayne's Folly," which gave the critics hope that a new star was rising in the literary firmament, a hope that was confirmed when from his pen, as a labor of love, came "The Outcast of the Islands," "The Nigger of the Narcissus" and a dozen other novels that have made his name known not only where English is spoken and read but in France, Germany and throughout the world.

Only a short time ago two rising young French writers made a pilgrimage to Mr. Conrad's home in Kent that they might see and study the man who, as they put it, is sounding a really original note in the English world of letters. Following in their footsteps, that the readers of the HERALD may be introduced to the author as he is at home, I travelled from London to Capel House, Hamstreet-Orlestone, on the day when the big railway strike was declared in England. The train, crawling slowly past many fields of ripening hops in Kent, "the Garden of England," was an hour and a quarter late at Hamstreet, and I procured an early Victorian barouche at the Duke's Head, an inn with six centuries of history behind it and a phonograph that was playing Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" when I entered the house.

Capel House.

As this ancient vehicle, after a funereal jaunt through a hedged in, sweet smelling country lane, reached the crest of Cotton Hill, Orlestone, a smart, natty looking lad, mounted on a bicycle, exchanged a word with the dozing driver, circled the carriage with a speed that shocked the Hamstreet Jehu and was off like the wind, so that when I arrived at Capel House Mr. Conrad met me at the door and welcomed me to his home as a prelude to the most delightful afternoon I have spent in England.

The author is of spare figure, above the medium height, with a sea bronzed face of an ascetic, studious type, beard and mustache tinged with gray and dark eyes that sparkle when he talks, as if furnishing accompaniment to his conversation, for Mr. Conrad talks well and fluently, with a little touch of foreign accent that adds to the charm of his words and makes you marvel at the command of the English tongue obtained by the Polish boy who, orphaned at the age of twelve, went before the mast at sixteen, and at nearly two score, as an invalided master mariner, astonished literary England.

Capel House is a two story red brick, moated farmhouse, centuries old, set in the centre of a substantial farm. Only five families have owned it.

"When I leased the place," said Mr. Conrad, "from Mr. Oliver, a solicitor, who is the owner and my friend, everything about the place—the old fashioned kitchen garden, the acres of green grass, the trees, the birds and the quietude—appealed to me, and I said to him, 'You only want this place as a refuge over Sunday; I want it for a home.' I got it. But there is one disadvantage, it is girdled by a dense forest, as you see, and this seems to shut off the air and gives one a sort of confined feeling. I love the open—freedom." There spoke the dominant thought of the man—freedom. He is a son of Polish exiles who suffered for freedom, and, descended from Polish soldiers who fought for it, he is proud of their history.

"Yes," he said, when I asked about his family as we were entering his simple little study, "my people were all Polish patriots. Here," said he, turning over the leaves of a family album, "are their pictures. These are my grandfathers, both soldiers; these are my grandmothers, pure Polish types; these are my uncles, all soldiers, and this old lady is my godmother, the wife (throwing up his head proudly as he said it) of the Grand Chamberlain of the last King of Poland."

In this pride of race and love for a kingdom lost I thought I saw the reason for his late declaration:—"As a seaman, I want to be known as one who served under the English flag; as an author, it is my ambition to be known as an English man of letters!"

Sketching briefly the story of his life, as we sat in his little study, Mr. Conrad told how, when he was eight his mother died, the result of sufferings in exile. "And," said the author, "my father died when I was twelve, an exile, too, and I was left in the care of an uncle, a fine man, who was a second father. From my governess I learned French, and I remember with delight, even now, the feeling of joy when, owing, no doubt, to a good report from that governess, my dear old godmother presented me with a copy of your Fenimore Cooper's "The Last of the Mohicans" in French.

From Able Seaman to Master.

"When I was fourteen I felt the call of the sea," said Mr. Conrad, "something unheard of in a Polish boy. My uncles and the others of my family were determinedly opposed to my becoming a sailor, and this is the time, if the HERALD will permit, to contradict a bit of fiction that has annoyed me. I did not run away from Poland to Constantinople to ship as a cabin boy; in fact, I have been to Constantinople only once in the course of my sailoring, and then, as a man, I finally induced my relatives to give their reluctant consent to a sea life, and my uncle found a berth for me on a collier at Marseilles. Later I shipped as an ordinary seaman at Newcastle, and since then I have served on many vessels in many seas, through all the grades—from able seaman to master of both sailing vessels and steamships.

"I have been often ill," said Mr. Conrad," and it was through one of these attacks that I came to be in Bangkok, Siam, when the Ortolan came in without a master. My old friends the Simpsons, a shipping firm who were ever kind to me, offered me the command, and thus it was that I took the first cargo of Siamese teakwood to Australia. I well remember that the owners were inclined to sell or dismantle the Ortolan—she had never paid—but when I became master her luck turned and for the two years that I commanded her she made twenty per cent.

"I was always a good business man for others," said the author, whimsically; "never for myself."

"Have you ever been in the United States?" I asked.

"Never," said Mr. Conrad. "Strangely enough, in all my sailoring I have never crossed the North Atlantic; yet I have touched Hayti and other West Indian ports, and have been to Venezuela. I have never touched your Pacific coast, either."

"But you will visit America?"

Start of His Literary Career.

With a movement that could have been interpreted to mean that he might go—sometime—the author invited me to sit with him in his cosy little garden.

On the way out of the "den," where a model of a sailing yacht and the picture of a full rigged ship told of thoughts of his closed life, I noticed a set of Henry James' works, and Mr. Conrad fairly beamed as he said:—

"I am very proud of those books—they were sent to me by Mr. James when I was comparatively unknown, and I will always prize a perfectly delightful letter from him that came with them."

As we sat in the garden Mr. Conrad, who, like most intellectual men, has "nerves," and, like the majority of spare men, is energetic and very active, discoursed reminiscently of boyhood days, when his "fairy godmother" presented him with copies of Shakespeare and Dickens in Polish, and then I learned incidentally that the sailor-author reads Italian and Spanish and has a smattering of strange tongues picked up while at sea.

Then he spoke of Boris, his thirteen-year-old boy, who dotes on Jacobs' sea and shore stories, and is a student on H. M. S. Worcester, the nautical training college, "where they still sleep in hammocks as in Nelson's day." Boris wants to be an engineer, has a perfect passion for mechanics, and can tell the make of any automobile by a glance at the hood.

"Boris tells me he is a duffer at cricket," said Mr. Conrad, "but he hopes to make the ship's football team, and I said, 'Right; go in, and go in hard, for the things that appeal to you.'

"Then there's little Jack—christened John Alexander"—a slight lad of five, dark haired and brown legged, who was chasing butterflies near by. "He says I'm no good now because, owing to the natural indolence of a retired sailor and a touch of gout, I don't romp with him nowadays. Seriously, however, it is illness more than indolence that is responsible for avoidance of exercise, but I do not complain, for I always remember that illness transformed me into a writer. This was the way of it:—

"I was in command of an armed Belgian steamer on the Congo, fell ill later at Stanley Falls, was invalided to London, and there, living in Bessborough Gardens, seeking a way to pass the mornings, I began to write, and, being encouraged to offer my story to a publisher, I awoke one day to find myself an author. Then, spurred on by ambition, came my other books, all the result of hard, painstaking work.

"In writing I strive always to do something that will count, and probably the dissemination of that fact explains why, somehow, there is an idea in the minds of some folks that one must pray and fast for days and nights before taking a course of Conrad. How perfectly absurd! There is nothing, if I may say it, recondite or, shall I say, Meredithian in my works. They deal with the primitive emotions, and surely everybody can understand them.

"I am the pupil of no master, the exponent of no accepted school of literature. I follow my own impulses, and for sixteen years I have been trying to do good work—work that I hope will live. Some authors write felicitously and fluently. To me writing is extremely laborious and I have often risen from my desk at two o'clock in the morning after a long night's labor more exhausted than after my hardest day's work on shipboard, and I have done everything there—carried bags of wheat, shovelled coal into the furnaces and performed all the other severe forms of physical labor that are part of the routine of life aboard ship—to find that I had completed only a thousand words.

Does Best Work at Night.

"But I can sleep soundly six hours at a stretch," said Mr. Conrad, "and always rise refreshed at eight o'clock in the morning ready for what the day may bring. It is in the silence of the night, when all is quiet and the others of the household are at rest, that I do my best work. Ever since I began on the NEW YORK HERALD story—I always call it that—I have labored far into the night, unless when ill, and until a short time ago I was very ill for fully six months and confined to my bed for ninety days.

"Just as when at sea I was wedded to my ship, so now I am wedded to my literary life. Although, as I said, I am the pupil of no school of fiction, all English writers are descended from Dickens and Thackeray—Thackeray, who wrote for and of the upper middle classes of Europe, extolling their virtues, exposing their weaknesses and satirizing their prejudices with a light, delicious, skeptical touch, while Dickens' humor and pathos, like those of your own great Mark Twain, are truly national, but so natural in mirroring the joys and sorrows of the workaday folk of this country that their appeal is universal and he is read everywhere."

Mr. Conrad would not discuss contemporary writers of fiction.

"I feel kindly toward them and am proud of their friendship," he said, "but if I talked of them I might strike a note of criticism, and criticism, as a rule, is misunderstood. However, if I were warranted in saying anything to the young writers of to-day I would ask them to put more heart and soul into their work—not to write something that will sell promptly, but, rather, something that will endure. They should endeavor to make literature. That is what I am striving to do, and if readers want Conrad I hope that they will ask for him because they want literature. That will make me happy and conscious of having done something worth while."

Has Many Prominent Visitors.

"Are you not lonely here?" I asked, as I thought of the straggling little village down the road, with its primitive cottages and still more primitive folk.

"Not at all," said the author. "We have many visitors—charming folk who come from all over the countryside, from London, and even from foreign lands. But they are all people who have done or are doing something in the world of art and letters. We have many dear friends whom it is a privilege to know, but we do not court the company of people who can boast of riches or family trees only. We welcome them if they come, but we have so little in common with idlers that a courtesy visit ends in a nodding acquaintance.

"We cannot accommodate many visitors in our little home; we have only two spare rooms. But many of our friends have automobiles, and that means a delightful visit, a swift moonlight ride and home."

"No telephone?" I asked.

"What for?" was the counter. "We have the telegraph, only a mile away, and that serves all purposes."

But because there is no telephone the readers must not imagine that Mr. Conrad lives with Hamstreet simplicity.

What Mr. Conrad Says About the Herald Novel

Not at all. Capel House has every convenience, the market town of Ashford is within easy reach—barring railway strikes—and for the rest there are acres of farm land and pastures, and a sweet little garden—but always those encircling trees.

"We run up to the theatre quite often in the season too," said Mrs. Conrad.

Very little has been written about Mrs. Conrad in this article. Why? Because, apart from a few words with the author's wife when I entered the house, I did not see her again until just before I left, as she had been attending a dear friend, also an author, who, stricken with illness while on a visit to Capel House, was nursed by Mrs. Conrad with motherly care. Do you want a clearer picture than that? Then imagine a sweet faced woman with laughing eyes and dimpled cheeks, proud and fond of her husband and her boys, who makes you feel "at home" the moment you enter the house, and there you have it.

The Duke's Head.

I left them standing in their farmhouse garden—the author, his wife and the two boys—a charming picture.

I will now let you into the secret of why Mr. Conrad likes to work late at night.

Because when all is quiet he can hear the swish of the sea as it strikes the shores near Rye, six miles beyond that encircling forest, and on foggy nights he can hear the great fog sirens off Dungeness!

In the Duke's Head there was a gathering of the village notables—blacksmith, green grocer and a rather pompous rosy cheeked estate agent—all putting away "stout and bitter" and discussing the big "stroike" the while they carelessly dropped the definite and indefinite articles from their speech.

In Hamstreet, a place of about one hundred souls, everybody knows Conrad, but you should have seen the look of amazement on the face of mine host of the Duke's Head when I asked him to tell me about the young French authors who had stopped there.

"I knew were somebodies," he said. "They put noses into all old pots, pans, stuck heads up chimneys, felt all beds, examined taproom, behaved very queerly altogether. So were writers, eh? Queenie, my daughter, who speaks bit French, thought were uncommon folk."

I left the Duke's Head as that phonograph in the heart of Kent was reeling off "The Barbers' Ball," an American coon song.

The 7:38 train left Hamstreet at 8:10 that night, and after a four hours' journey, marked by many stops of the train and "scoutings" by the train hands, I arrived in London to find the big strike was over.

Distant Action of Tactile Sense

[From the European Edition of the Herald]

AS an illustration of the action of the tactile sense at a distance, the ingeniously simple experiment of Dr. Spallanzani is very instructive. He introduced a blind bat into a corridor enclosed by a curtain. The bat flew about without touching the walls or the curtain. After a comparatively brief time the animal made its escape from the corridor through a rent, scarcely greater than its body, which had been left in the middle of the curtain. By what sense was its flight guided and by what sense did it find a way out?

In the case of blind men an equally puzzling sense of direction has frequently been observed. In some instances they "see" obstacles with such discernment and avoid them with such precision that one may readily credit them with the possession of a "sixth sense."

This "sixth sense" of the blind, the "sense of obstacles" or "touch at a distance," has been studied by Dr. Kunz, of Mulhouse, in a series of articles published a few months ago in the "Ophtalmologie Provinciale."

It is a special sensibility, varying greatly in individuals, and depending also on the attention, the fatigue, and especially on the temperature of the air. But in reality there is no question of a sixth sense in blind people, since, on the one hand, all the blind do not possess the faculty, and, on the other hand, a certain number of people who are not blind may also give evidence of it.

It is therefore independent of blindness in itself. Certain cases of blindness, those produced by accident, never give signs of it, whereas in cases of different origin it is fairly frequent, especially when nervousness exists. A curious fact is that the majority of the subjects possessing this peculiar sensibility are quite unaware of the faculty.

What is the nature of this sensibility? It does not depend upon sound, because the deaf may be endowed with it. Silence extends its range, which, however, is not influenced by the nature of the walls of the room nor by their position, as would be the case were it a question of acoustic waves. The range of this sensibility is absolutely independent of the condition of all other auditive functions.

It is of a tactile nature and due to the resistance of the air. It increases with the speed of the subject's displacement with regard to the stationary obstacle or of the approach of the object with reference to the stationary subject.

It bears some relation to the degree of sensitiveness of the skin. Those, whether blind or not blind, who can feel a hair giving a pressure of one milligramme are endowed with it, while those who cannot feel a hair giving a pressure of two milligrammes are devoid of it. If they feel the hair of one milligramme on one side only they will have the faculty of discerning obstacles on that side alone.

The forehead is especially the region of the face where subjects localize their impressions. This sensibility is therefore of a tactile nature, depending in the first place on the pressure and displacement of air and in the second place on its temperature.

"The Ten o'Clock Line."

THE most original and primitive way of marking a boundary was probably that of Queen Dido and her colony when they stipulated before the founding of Carthage for as much land as could be enclosed by a bull's hide. All tribes belonging to the infancy of civilization have like peculiar modes of reckoning.

From a point near the mouth of the Miami River extends northwest through Indiana a boundary known as "the ten o'clock line." This is one limit of an Indian grant. When the tribe had agreed to cede a portion of their territory to the whites a meeting was held for the purpose of marking out the ground. A surveyor was present and had mounted his compass and telescope on a tripod.

The head man of the tribe went up to the instruments, stared steadily at them for a while, grunted and returned to the circle about the council fire. Not a word was spoken by any one. Soon another Indian arose, walked sedately to the instruments, gravely examined them, grunted and returned to his place by the fire. This example was followed by half a dozen others, after which a short consultation ensued.

The chief then approached the white men. "That what Indian know," he said, drawing a small circle on the ground with a stick; "that what white man know," drawing a larger circle round the first; "this what nobody know," he added, pointing to what lay without the last circle. "White man know that," indicating the instruments; "Indian not know it. Indian know sun. He never cheat. Him always same. Him throw shadow. Indian give white man land one side."

After long consultation it was decided that a line drawn in the direction in which the sun would cast a shadow from an agreed point at ten o'clock should be made the boundary, the white men taking the land on one side and the Indians keeping that on the other.

TATTOO MARKS.

From the European Edition of the Herald]

WITH few exceptions all persons disfigured by tattoo marks regret that they ever allowed to be traced on their skin designs which are considered as indelible stigmata and are only glad to submit to any acceptable pr which may get rid of them.

One such method is described by Tranchant in Le Caducée. It will re tattoo marks made with India ink lampblack.

It consists in rubbing the skin energetically until a thin layer of epidermis has been removed and then applying to the skin a paste made of quicklime, hydrated when required for use, and to which at the moment of hydration there is added a tablespoonful of pulverized phosphorus, the whole being stirred until well mixed. The tattooed part is coated with this paste. A dry dressing is then made, which is removed two days afterward. The crust which will have formed is allowed to dry freely exposed to the air, and after a time it becomes detached of its own accord. The process occupies about fifteen days. A second application is then made. A third is rarely necessary.

Tattoo marks treated in this manner disappear completely without leaving the slightest scar.